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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM PERRY

PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER, GRANIC, AND DEFENSE MINISTER SUSAK

ZAGREB, CROATIA

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Zagreb, July 22 -- U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry met with senior officials from the Croatian and Bosnian governments, and UNPROFOR during a one-day visit to Zagreb on Friday, July 22.

In a joint appearance with U.S. Ambassador to Croatia Peter W. Galbraith, Croatian Foreign Minister Mate Granic, and Croatian Defense Minister Gojko Susak, Dr. Perry emphasized the importance of conferring with Croatian officials directly on the conflict in Croatia and Bosnia, noting that, "As a nation that is most directly affected by security problems here, their views have unique importance."

Dr. Perry announced the establishment of education and training programs for Croatian military personnel, and noted that once a peace plan is achieved in the region, "the United States will be prepared to fully support the membership for Croatia in the Partnership For Peace."

(unofficial transcript)

AMBASSADOR GALBRAITH: Greetings. We've just concluded a meeting between Secretary Perry and Foreign Minister Granic and Defense Minister Susak. This is a very special day in U.S./Croatian relations. It represents the first visit of a Cabinet Secretary to a free and independent Croatia, and the second visit of a member of President Clinton's Cabinet.

Secretary Perry is the nineteenth U.S. Defense Secretary, and is here in the seventh country of a six-day trip to the region. He arrived here on very short notice, as you know. But I think this has been an extremely productive day. Now, I'll turn the podium over to Dr. Perry.

SECRETARY PERRY: Thank you very much Mr. Ambassador. I came to Zagreb to seek the views of not only the UNPROFOR leadership, which I achieved earlier today, but the Croatian government leadership. I've just finished a meeting with Minister Granic and Minister Susak. This was a very useful meeting. They've given me their personal assessments, not only of the situation in Croatia, but the security issues in Bosnia as well. As a nation that is most directly affected by security problems there, their views have unique importance and I will, when I return to Washington tomorrow, convey these views immediately to Secretary Christopher and President Clinton.

I expressed my view, in which they fully agree, that we have to be moving towards a peace plan in Croatia, as well as in Bosnia. We should give that considerable priority, as we move into the future. A key to this is UNPROFOR. I argue strongly that we need to maintain the UNPROFOR forces here.

Besides the discussion of the international aspects of monitoring and ensuring the peace here, we also talked about bilateral relationships between our two nations and agreed to establish defense relationships, in particular with an emphasis on defense education and training programs that would involve Croatian officers, non-commissioned officers, participating in training and education programs in the United States. I'd like to now give Minister Granic and Minister Susak a chance to comment.

FOREIGN MINISTER GRANIC: Ladies and Gentlemen, we discussed the situation in the region and our bilateral relations. Croatia strongly supports the Contact Group proposal and the implementation of the Washington Agreement in the future confederation between the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Saturday, President Tudjman will visit Mostar at the inauguration of Mr. Kostic.

Concerning the situation in Croatia, we expect a much more effective mandate for UNPROFOR, especially concerning the protection of our borders, and the mutual recognition between Serbia and Croatia. Our primary goal is the peaceful reintegration of the UNPA zones into the legal system of Croatia and our integration possibilities with the European Union. Concerning our bilateral relations, Mr. Susak will give our statement.

DEFENSE MINISTER SUSAK: First, I would like to welcome Secretary Perry to Croatia. I would like to paraphrase the statement Armstrong made 25 years ago, "This may be a small step of good will for the United States and a great leap for Croatia." Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Q: Mr. Secretary, have you heard anything, especially from UNPROFOR officials and UNPROFOR military leaders, to give you confidence that the Bosnian war will be settled any time soon and that the United States will not be dragged more deeply into it?

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SEC. PERRY: In getting a resolution to the Bosnian conflict, the path is not going to be either fast or simple. The next major step here will be the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Contact Group which is scheduled for the 30th of July. There, they will have to decide how to respond to the reply which the Bosnian Serbs made to the peace plan. As you know, this reply was disappointing to the American Ambassador and we can expect that at that meeting on the 30th it will be a difficult issue in deciding among the rather complex and difficult paths ahead.

Q: Mr. Secretary, do you view the response on the part of the Serbs as a rejection, or is there still room for talk?

SEC. PERRY: That's going to be up to the Foreign Ministers to decide at the 30th July meeting. It was not an acceptance of the plan, and that's what the Contact Group had asked for. This is not what they asked for, therefore they will have to decide then, at the 30th July meeting, what the appropriate response is to this disappointing answer.

Q: How does the Clinton administration view it? How do you view it?

SEC. PERRY: How the Clinton administration feels will be expressed at that 30th of July meeting by Secretary Christopher, and not by me today.

Q: Any comment on Mr. Kozyrev's statement that the Bosnian Serbs' answer was rather positive.

SEC. PERRY: As I said, we considered it not a positive answer, but a disappointing answer. It's going to greatly complicate the path ahead. We would sincerely hope that between now and the 30th of July meeting that the Bosnian Serbs will reconsider their answer and give the Foreign Ministers something more positive to work on at that meeting.

Q: Mr. Secretary, have you discussed the issue of the possible membership of Croatia in the "Partnership for Peace" plan?

SEC. PERRY: Yes, we did discuss that and I think it would be extremely desirable for Croatia, not just to become a member of the "Partnership for Peace", but to fully enter all of the different aspects of the Western world with all the benefits -- economic, political, defense cooperation. Some of those, in particular the membership in "Partnership for Peace", are going to depend on getting to the peace plan and getting this war resolved. At such time as that happens, the United States will be prepared to fully support the membership for Croatia in the "Partnership for Peace."